New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1957

Volume XVIII, Number 26 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of December 23, 1957

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"The Music Man"

New York Post

December 20, 1957

TWO on the AISLE

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

The Charm of Musical Americana

Describe "The Music Man" and you run the risk of having it greeted by the presumably devastating epithet, "corn." And I suppose that's what it is. But Meredith Willson's new musical comedy, which opened last night at the Majestic Theater, is such fresh, genial and warm-hearted corn, so indigenously American in its 1912 Iowa atmosphere, its humor, breeziness, sentiment and good, old-fashioned tunefulness that it is not only delightful but, in some paradoxical manner, boldly original. Furthermore, it enables Robert Preston to triumph in its title role.

It has been recognized for quite a while in this vicinity that Mr. Preston is a very fine actor, a notable comedian and a talented player of serious roles. But we had never seen him in a musical comedy or in a part that so dominated an evening, and his portrayal of a good-natured con man, an itinerant vendor of trombones and other band instruments, with both larceny and sentiment in his heart, combines racy, humorous and charming characterization with a pleasant ability to put over a song or a dance. He really comes into his heritage.

Native Touch

It seems to me that there hasn't been in recent years a more complete example of musical comedy Americana than "The Music Man" offers, and that even includes the classic and more ambitious "Oklahoma!" To achieve this quality, it has to fall back on some familiar plot materials, but they are handled with such candor and sincerity that they become a virtue. From its easy-going humor and its frank sentimentality to its barber-shop ballads and its admiration for the likable swindler, Mr. Willson's show is a true native product, and proud of it.

"The Music Man" starts out so splendidly, with a wonderful rythmic scene of irate traveling salesmen in a railway coach, that it sets a dangerous pace for itself, and there are times in the first act when it grows a little winded. But it fortunately recovers its speed and its spirit and moves on to a happy ending that is as welcome as it is utterly expected. Indeed, the warm spell of its sentimental humor is so pervading that I don't think we of its first audience could have borne it if the townspeople hadn't forgiven the lovable fraud.

Mr. Willson, who reveals an agreeable all-around skill as librettist, lyricist and composer, has composed a score that is magnificently unambitious. It has no higher desire than to be gay, tuneful and in the mood of the occasion, and its succession of mock-serious ballads, band numbers and sentimental songs is enchanting. I recall with particular pleasure "76 Trombones," "Goodnight My Someone," "Wells Fargo Wagon," "Lida Rose" and "Gary, Indiana," but all of them struck me as entirely engaging in their bright and genial simplicity.

Although the performance of the evening is Mr. Preston's, there is a fresh and charming portrayal of a romantic librarian by the unfailing Barbara Cook, while David Burns, Pert Kelton, young Eddie Hodges, Helen Raymond and a quartet called the Buffalo Bills are especially helpful. Morton Da Costa's staging, Onna White's choreography, Howard Bay's sets and Raoul Pene du Bois' costumes are just what they should be. Perhaps, as the Bard said, the wheel has come full circle. Anyway, the old-fashioned charm of "The Music Man" seems beautifully fresh.

"THE MUSIC MAN"

Musical comedy in two acts and sixteen scenes with book, music and lyrics by Meredith Willson; based on a story by Mr. Willson and Frank Lacey; staged by Morton Da Costa; choreography by Onna White; orchestrations by Don Walker; settings and lighting by Howard Bay; costumes by Raoul Pene du Bois; presented by Kermit Bloomgarden with Herbert Greene in association with Frank Productions, Inc., at the Majestic Theatre, December 19, 1957. The cast:

Charlie Cowell.....Paul Reed
Conductor.....Carl Nicholas
Harold Hill.....Robert Preston
Mayor Shinn.....David Burns
Edward Dunlop.....Al Shea
Oliver Hix.....Wayne Ward
Jacey Squires.....Vern Reed
Olin Britt.....Bill Spangenberg
Marcellus Washburn.....
Iggie Wolfington
Tommy Dillas...Danny Carroll
Marian Paroo...Barbara Cook
Mrs. Paroo.....Pert Kelton
Amaryllis.....Marilyn Siegel
Winthrop Paroo...Eddie Hodges
Eulalie Mackecknie Shinn....
Helen Raymond
Zaneeta Shinn....Dusty Worrall
Gracie Shinn.....Barbara Travis
Alma Hix.....Adnia Rice
Maud Dunlop.....Elaine Swann
Ethel Toffelmier...Peggy Mondo
Mrs. Squires.....Martha Flynn
Constable Locke...Carl Nicholas

The New York Times

December 20, 1957

Theatre: 'Music Man'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

DOLLARS to doughnuts, Meredith Willson dotes on brass bands.

In "The Music Man," which opened last evening at the Majestic, he has translated the thump and razzle-dazzle of brass-band lore into a warm and genial cartoon of American life. Since the style is gaudy and since David Burns plays a small town mayor with low-comedy flourishes, "The Music Man" is a cartoon and not a valentine.

But Mr. Willson's sophistication is skin-deep. His heart is in the wonderful simplicities of provincial life in Iowa in 1912, and his musical show glows with enjoyment. Mr. Willson's music is innocent; the beat is rousing and the tunes are full of gusto. The dances, improvised by Onna White, are rural and festive. Raoul Péne du Bois' country costumes are humorously hospitable. With Robert Preston in top form in the leading part, the cast is as exuberant as opening day at a county fair.

If Mark Twain could have collaborated with Vachel Lindsay, they might have devised a rhythmic lark like "The Music Man," which is as American as apple pie and a Fourth of July oration.

It is the story of a traveling-salesman charlatan who cannot read music or play any instrument, but who sells the boys of River City a brass band and gorgeous uniforms. His motives are dishonest. But during the weeks when he is mulcting the customers, he transforms a dull town into a singing and dancing community. In the last scene the law is hot on his heels. But. don't worry. Mr. Willson approves of his charlatan as thoroughly as he loves the town librarian, the barber shop quartet, the kids, the ladies, the railroad, and the vitality of life in the Middle West.

In other hands, this could easily look like an assembly job, clever, smart and spurious. Serving as his own librettist, composer and lyric-writer, Mr. Willson has given it the uniformity of a well-designed crazy-quilt in which every patch blends with its neighbor. By some sort of miracle, his associates have caught his point of view exactly. Morton Da Costa's droll, strutting direction; Don Walker's blaring orchestrations; Howard Bay's jovial scenery, including a racing locomotive that drowns the orchestra players in steam when the curtain goes up—these aspects of the production have Mr. Willson's own kind of gaiety.

As the infectious bunko man, Mr. Preston could hardly be improved upon. His expansive energy and his concentration on the crisis of the moment are tonic. Since the music is unpretentious, he has no trouble in making it sound hearty. When the music is romantic, Barbara Cook is on hand to sing it beautifully. She is also a beguiling actress in fresh and pleasant fashions.

But the cast is attractive in every instance. Pert Kelton as a harsh-voiced Irish widow; Iggie Wolfington as a breathless conspirator; little Eddie Hodges as a lisping youth and little Marilyn Siegel as a girl who can play cross-hand on the piano, Al Shea, Wayne Ward, Vern Reed and Bill Spangleberg as close-harmonizers—are immensely entertaining.

For Mr. Willson has given them lively, artless things to do, and they keep him good company. Like Richard Bissell, another Iowa playwright, Mr Willson has a fresh slant on Americana. Although he does not take it seriously, he loves it with the pawkiness of a liberated native. "The Music Man" is a marvelous show, rooted in wholesome and comic tradition.

Daily Mirror

December 20, 1957

ROBERT COLEMAN'S THEATRE

'The Music Man' Is Solid Hit

Meredith Willson, eminent musicologist of the airwaves, has reached back into his boyhood and come up with a heart-warming song-and-dancer called "The Music Man." Naturally, the locale is Iowa, where, in the small town of Mason City, Willson played the flute in the local band because no one else thereabouts had mastered that instrument.

The wonderful thing about "The Music Man" is that it will prove delightfully nostalgic for those who have lived in whistle stops, and provide first-rate fun for city slickers. Come to think of it, you'd be surprised at the number of city slickers who came from hamlets to make good in our big town.

The music man is one "Professor" Harold Hill, a clever con artist who specializes in selling band instruments and uniforms to gullible yokels. Having collected the dough, he blows the burgs with the loot, leaving the victims to master their trumpets and trombones as best they may.

HE WAS DOING all right until he hit River City, Iowa, and met a pretty librarian-piano teacher. When the time came to flee, he couldn't. He'd been tender-trapped. Meanwhile, he'd provided the community with a lot of constructive excitement, and, in the clutch, the citizenry proved grateful. They'd gotten their money's worth.

In fashioning "The Music Man," Willson has used songs and dances to further the action of his daffy dip into decent sentiment. Like operatic composers, he's kept the spoken word to a minimum. And that's quite all right by us, for the result is a musical that moves with the speed of a rocket and the conviviality of a county fair.

Kermit Bloomgarden, who sponsors the new arrival at the Majestic Theatre in association with Herbert Greene and Frank Productions, Inc., has found the right people to make it as vivid as a Turner sky. He's made a 10-strike in landing Robert Preston for the title role.

We don't have to tell you that we've been beating the drums for Bob over the years. But it took his current vehicle to bring home to us just how versatile our boy really is. He paces the piece dynamically, acts ingratiatingly, sings as if he'd been doing it all his life, and offers steps that would score on the cards of dance judges. A triumphant performance in a triumphant musical!

BARBARA COOK is captivating as the prim librarian who learns that life isn't to be found just in books. Here's a doll, if we ever saw one. David Burns, as a pompous mayor; Helen Raymond, as his wife, who throws over the traces for a Delsarte fling; Pert Kelton, as a knowing mother; and Iggie Wolfington, as a reformed sharpshooter are perfectly swell.

Salutes also must go to the Buffalo Bills, a barber-shop quartet that would have had the Monday afternoon audience at the Palace in the old days blistering its palms; Paul Reed, Danny Carroll, Dusty Worrall, Eddie Hughes and Marilyn Siegel. The diminutive Hodges and Siegel captured the affection of the first-nighters.

Morton Da Costa's staging, Onna White's choreography, Howard Bay's settings, Raoul Pene Du Bois's costumes, Don Walker's orchestration, and Herbert Greene's batoneering are all off the top shelf.

If you want to be happy, spend an evening with "The Music Man." It'll make your feet snap into a marching step to "Seventy-Six Trombones," make you reach for your hankie to mop moist eyes to "Goodnight My Someone" and want to dance in the aisles to "Shipoopi." What a show! What a hit! What a solid hit!

Journal-American

December 20, 1957

A Whopping Hit, It'll Run and Run

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE most important thing to be said about "The Music Man," which opened at the Majestic Theatre last night, is that it is a whopping hit. It is a new musical in the old manner; it has blare and brass, it jiggles and jumps, it has speed and style, and its people are beguiling. This salute by Meredith Willson to his native Iowa will make even Oklahoma look to its laurels.

No need to pry too insistently into the story. It is the familiar yarn of the "con" man who comes to fleece the populace of a small town, who tarries to regenerate himself and, by accident, the customers. The idea is durable, and it is presented by Kermit Bloomgarden expensively and well; Morton Da Costa has plotted the proceedings with infinite understanding. You want two down front? Call us late in May.

The overall ingredients that inspire this celebration are a combination of Mr. Willson's talents as a composer of rollicking march and plaintive ballad, plus an inspirational bit of casting.

Robert Preston, credited lately as a comedian, here emerges as a song - and - dance man of parts. His pipes will not chase even Rex Harrison out of town, but he can dance a fine jig and, more important than all else, he is very, very appealing. A true renegade in such spots, he can act.

Gifted Girl

He is joined by Barbara Cook, a young lady who is similarly gifted as a performer, with a trained voice and a saucy and engaging manner. Then there is David Burns, a postgraduate of the huff-and-puff school, and Pert Kelton, the understanding mother.

But rearing his red mane high in the credits is a young man named Eddie Hodges, aged almost 11, who stops the proceedings with a solo number called "Gary, Indiana". It is the one extra-Iowa plaint of the evening, and it, is merely magnificent.

Reading from left to right, I would say that the show's opener, a staccato traveling salesmen's chantey, is a buoyant invention. "Iowa Stubborn" gets us into the mood of River City, where the skirmish takes place, and "Goodnight My Someone" presents Miss Cook melodiously.

There follow some rousing interludes like "Seventy-Six Trombones", with Mr. Preston, and a happy melange of "Pick-a-little" and "Goodnight Ladies", the latter sung by The Buffalo Bills, as fine a barber-shop quartet as ever fractured a tonsil. Their rendition of "Lida Rose" in the second stanza would bring a tear to the eye of a strike-breaker.

In reviewing my notes I discover that I have not called attention to "Shipoopi", an incredible hoe-down; "It's You", "Will I Ever Tell" and "Till There Was You"—all entrants in a juke-box Olympic.

"The Music Man" — adept sets by Howard Bay and bright choreography by Onna White—is a wonderfully rewarding evening. You want two down front? Better not bother us in May.

Make it June.

DAILY NEWS

December 20, 1957

'The Music Man' One of the Best Musical Comedies of Our Time

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"The Music Man," which offered itself to the season's happiest audience last evening at the Majestic Theatre, is one of the few great musical comedies of the last 26 years.

It was 26 years ago that "Of Thee I Sing" appeared at the Music Box, and it set a standard for fun and invention which seldom has been reached. Its equal arrived in 1950—"Guys and Dolls"—and I would say that "The Music Man" ranks with these two. Bear in mind that I am talking about musical comedy, pure and simple, and not about the folk operas, operettas and tuneful tragedies which have enriched our stage.

A remarkable thing about "The Music Man" is that it is by one man, Meredith Willson, who is unknown to Broadway; book, lyrics and music all are his, and all are captivating. But Willson is by no means a tyro; as a flutist he is a veteran of Sousa's band and the Philharmonic, and as a music man he is a radio producer dating way back to the Maxwell House Show Boat.

Small Town Stuff

Willson is from Mason City, Iowa, and "The Music Man" is a fond and enormously funny recollection of his youth. The time is 1912 and the place is an Iowa town. The time was a time for Delsarte eurythmics, town bands, barber shop quartets and Fourth of July orations.

Such things as these could be kidded—but not in "The Music Man." They are presented fondly and respectfully, and they go into the making of an utterly light-hearted, high-spirited musical.

The opening scene, after a locomotive has blown steam over all the jolly musicians, is a coach on the Rock Island Railroad. Here, as they jounce along, are the traveling salesmen of the time, talking shop. One of them is Robert Preston, who is in an odd line. His pitch is to sell musical instruments and uniforms to the young of a town and then hop a train before anybody realizes that nobody has learned how to play.

Should Be Done Twice

In this particular town where he drops off he falls in love with the prim and proper librarian, Barbara Cook—and this is all one needs know about the story. The chief thing one should know is that this musical is put together so expertly and acted and sung and danced by so many enchanting people that it should be either twice as long or performed twice at each performance.

Preston is splendid as the jaunty faker of the title role, and Miss Cook is a most attractive leading lady. The players include David Burns as a pompous mayor, Iggie Wolfington as a fat pixy, Helen Raymond as a wonderfully imperious social leader, Pert Kelton as a salty Irish mother and Eddie Hodges as a small boy with the loudest lisp this side of the Bronx. These and many others are happy, funny people.

The sets by Howard Bay, the costumes by Raoul Pene du Bois, the dances by Onna White all have the charm and innocence of a period when there were no wars or psychoanalysts. Morton Da Costa has directed "The Music Man" with absolute skill, and there are so many good songs and choral numbers that there is neither time nor space to list them now.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 20, 1957

Tune Show Has Fun and Style

By FRANK ASTON.

"The Music Man" is a knockout, right from the first blare in the Majestic's orchestra pit. It opens with a band tune suggestive of a Western Conference football game and runs in high spirit all the way to the pounding march air in the finale. Geographically this mood is fitting, for the show is Meredith Willson's dedication of his book-music-lyric gifts of his adored Iowa.

Stage action starts with a great hissing of steam from a locomotive drawing a string of cars into which we peep while drummers try to sing against their rattler's jouncing. Comes then to an Iowa town the travelingest traveling man of them all in the person of Robert Preston, who assumes the affable chore of demonstrating that he is nimble in dancing, ingratiating as a mountebank and amusingly accomplished as one of those vocalists who sing-it-by-talking-it. He's about to fleece the village parents by way of glib promises to transform their offspring into bandsmen, complete with instruments and uniforms, to be paid for in advance.

His machinations call for a girl to redeem him. And what a girl she is. She's Barbara Cook, cast as a librarian who is cold to masculine advances. If all our stack tenders looked, sang, danced and acted like Miss Barbara, this nation's book learning would be overwhelming.

Their romance embroils them in the funnier phases of village life in 1912 when a fellow with sleeve garters sparked a girl in high-laced shoes, a rat, ribbons, laces and plumes. A little girl sourly practicing at the piano, a little boy, with a lisp, overcoming his shyness and breaking into song, the tiny girl in a duet with Miss Cook, a barber shop quartet generously spreading close harmony, a school gym hoedown evolving into the thumps of a tango tea, a belle who says little more than "ye gods," Mr. Preston dancing alone, dancing with Miss Cook, singing about the evils of cubebs and the vulgarity of adjectives like "swell" — moments like these pile up and up under the Da Costa direction to become a new masterpiece that you'll take to your heart because it's so rich, so funny, so expertly done. It has more than riproaring entertainment, it has strength, a strength drawn from the fertile breast of this continent's Middle West.

The company includes David Burns, Pert Kelton, Iggie Wolfington, the Buffalo Bills, Helen Raymond and a long list of other gifted players. There are a number of kids and as usual they're like little miracles. Tiny Marilyn Siegel and red-haired, quiz-winning Eddie Hodges are real show stoppers. "The Music Man" is one you've been waiting for; it deserves to run at least a decade.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 20, 1957

FIRST NIGHT REPORT

WALTER KERR'S REVIEW

'The Music Man'

IT'S the beat that does it.

The overture of "The Music Man" drives off with a couple of good, shrill whistles and a heave-ho blast from half the brass in the pit, with the heartier trombonists lurching to their feet in a blare of enthusiasm. The curtain sails up to disclose the most energetic engine on the Rock Island Railroad — circa 1912 — hurtling across the proscenium with real smoke pouring out of its smokestack and real steam rolling along the rails.

The itch is upon us. Inside a railway coach, jovially proud of its red-plush seats and its tall coal stove, joggle a carload of traveling salesmen, heads bobbing in rhythm over their spread - eagled newspapers, knees bouncing uncontrollably as River City, Iowa, tumbles into view. Meredith Willson—librettist, composer, and lyricist of the delightful new show at the Majestic—has whipped out an entire first choral scene without a note of music. The words, the hands, the knees, and the insane Rock Island roadbed do all the work: grunts, roars, gossip, and a form of St. Vitus Dance all merge into a syncopated conversation that is irresistible.

• • •

A couple of minutes later the coach has pulled apart to let con-man Robert Preston leap to the platform, take a quick, oily look at some magnificently gullible townsfolk, and whip into a sneaky, insistent, finally rip-roaring spiel that no conductor's baton could ever haul to a stop.

Mr. Preston is impatient with dialogue. Let a couple of people talk, and he fidgets. Let a split-second gap in chatter turn up, and his feet starts working. A fairly fierce light turns up in his eyes, an urgent whisper begins to conspire with the underscoring, and the first thing you know designer Howard Bay's attractively pastel Main St. is beginning to sway in the breeze. Mr. Preston is also indefatigable: he's got zest and gusto and a great big grin for another slam-bang march tune ("Seventy Six Trombones"), for a wonderfully impish soft-shoe in the Public Library (it seems that "Marian, the Librarian" is so hard-hearted she'd let his corpse lie on the floor till it turned to carrion), and for a second-act square dance ("Shipoopi") that very nicely rocks the town gymnasium. Mr. Preston, to pin the matter down, is jim-dandy.

• • •

There are other people around, all of them bursting to be heard. Librarian Barbara Cook keeps the metronome going through a lively piano-lesson, then swiftly and fetchingly turns the mood upside-down by drifting to a window to yearn a bit over "Goodnight, My Someone" while the keys clatter in counterpoint behind her. A delectable girl. David Burns, given the evening's hardest row to hoe as a mayor saddled with malaprops and a low-comedy wife, throws out his chest like a happy fight-announcer and gives the impression of having successfully counted every one out.

Iggie Wolfington hoists himself onto tiptoe like an overweight Kewpie Doll ("The Sadder-But-Wiser Girl"), Pert Kelton puts her parakeet voice to work on some shanty-Irish bejabers, young Eddie Hodges lisps out a whole first-act finale, and a quartet known as The Buffalo Bills have a fine time with as many barbershop chords as Mr. Willson can remember. Director Morton da Costa keeps the brew bubbling happily from number to number, and choreographer Onna White somehow infuses some very familiar dance-forms with an invariably cheering vitality.

• • •

Let's admit that triple-threat man Willson shows a slight weakness in one department: when his yokels are reaching for comedy by mispronouncing "Pompeii," mistaking a painful bunion for a classic dance-step, or yammering out vagrant misunderstandings ("Gary Conservatory was my Alma Mater," "Was she, now?"), the pickings are slim. But the quiet gaps where gags should be are successfully swallowed up by the ebullient good-humor, the eternally infectious footwork, the inventive scoring, and the rich and racy gayety that erupts in an innocent world.

The beat is catching: the audience was applauding in rhythm as last night's curtain came down. I think you'll have a splendid time.

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews

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"A Shadow of My Enemy"

The New York Times

December 12, 1957

Theatre: Drama Based on Hiss Trial

'Shadow of My Enemy' Is Staged at ANTA

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NOTHING is said in the program to indicate that Sol Stein is dramatizing the Alger Hiss trial in "A Shadow of My Enemy," which opened at the ANTA Theatre last evening.

But in the play Horace Smith is the former State Department officer and current president of a peace organization who denies having been a member of a Communist spy apparatus. And Augustus Randall is the senior editor of Time who brings the charges, produces incriminating documents and proves his case to the satisfaction of the jury. In broad outline "A Shadow of My Enemy" is the Hiss trial that shook the country and the world from 1948 to 1950.

To say that Mr. Stein has "dramatized" the case is to exaggerate. He has arranged on the stage a précis of the Congressional hearing in which Whittaker Chambers accused Hiss of having been a member of a Soviet spy ring. The second act is a précis of the trial in which Hiss was found guilty.

In his design Donald Oenslager has filled the stage with an impressive circular setting that seems to hold this struggle for truth in the center of the world. As the stage director, Daniel Petrie, brings on the witnesses and organizes the testimony in the correct fashion of the traditional trial scene in the theatre.

Since the Hiss trial came as close to being a Greek tragedy as any public cause in our time, you might logically expect it to be a dramatic subject for the stage today. But Mr. Stein has not made it so. Most of his play is a tired repetition of facts and pieces of evidence that are already familiar.

In some interpolated remarks he suggests that the world is not sufficiently awake to the perils of communism. It is enjoying "the false comfort of apathy," the Chambers character observes. In a program note Mr. Stein says that "the kind, decent, generous, educated people" who understood the dangers of fascism "are not able to react with the same perception and feeling where communism is involved."

Even if this is true, which seems most unlikely to this theatregoer, Mr. Stein's recapitulation of things that are generally known is not likely to stimulate public opinion. Hiss was found guilty by due process of law before a jury; nothing has happened since to discredit the verdict. "A Shadow of My Enemy" restates the obvious without adding to it anything of much significance.

The acting of the chief parts is first-rate. Ed Begley's rumpled, earnest heavy-hearted portrait of the character founded on Chambers; Gene Raymond's polished, slightly supercilious portrait of the Hiss character; William Harrigan's folksy committee chairman; Anne Hegira's loyal wife to the accuser; Leon Janney's commentator for the skeptics—are good characterizations.

But Mr. Stein's attempt to interpret the trial in terms of dramatic ritual does not come off. He is not an eloquent writer, and Mr. Petrie's stage direction is perfunctory.

Ed Begley and Gene Raymond in Leads

"A SHADOW OF MY ENEMY"

Play in two acts by Sol Stein; staged by Daniel Petrie; designed and lighted by Donald Oenslager; presented by Nick Mayo at the ANTA Theatre, December 11, 1957. The cast:

A Man.....Leon Janney
Augustus Randall....Ed Begley
Holly Randall.....Anne Hegira
2nd Interrogator...Mason Adams
1st Interrogator..William Harrigan
Horace Smith....Gene Raymond
Lawyer.....Howard Wierum
Prosecutor....William Zuckert
Dr. Hans Eberhart..John McGovern
Jasper Colgrove...Tom Gorman
Gretchen Muller..Ulla Kazanova
Delilah Franklin..Alma Hubbard

New York Herald Tribune

December 12, 1957

First Night Report

Walter Kerr's Review

'A Shadow of My Enemy'

DURING the tussle of wills that is going on at the Anta Theater, actor Ed Begley stands in a shaft of very white light and defends himself by quoting—if I caught him correctly—a passage from "Hamlet," whereupon actor Gene Raymond raises his head into another long shaft of light and contemptuously sneers "That's a play."

We must be careful of sneering at plays. They're rather hard to write.

They don't get written, for instance, by the process of simply editing, adapting, and paraphrasing the court records of a famous trial. "A Shadow of My Enemy" is, from the outset, clearly concerned with the charges made by "a senior editor of Time magazine" that a State Department aide who "organized the United States side of the Yalta conference" was at one time in his career a member of the Communist party and actively engaged in treason. All right, it's Hiss-Chambers.

Thereafter we are given fragmentary echoes of nearly every step taken in a celebrated pursuit of truth. A man's teeth are examined. A nervous housewife muddles her dates. A Woodstock typewriter glares at us silently from the center of a great circular courtroom. Papers are found in a pumpkin.

But see here. Interesting as these materials have always been, they are not made more interesting — or specifically theatrical — by slicing them to ribbons, loosely knotting the ribbons together by means of an ambiguous narrator who finally turns out to be Public Apathy, and declaiming them in the strict, stiff rhythms of a court stenographer getting her punctuation right.

Author Sol Stein's dramaturgy is difficult to understand. Since we are treated very early in the evening to a flashback in which Gene Raymond's guilt is made utterly clear, any conceivable suspense is washed swiftly away. And since no one psychological twist or detective-story thrust is ever developed to cliff-hanging length, we are forced to leapfrog along from headline to headline, filling in the details from our memories of an actual event. It is doubtful, in fact, that the panorama would be wholly intelligible to someone who hadn't dipped into Mr. Chambers' "Witness" or read his family newspaper pretty carefully a few years back.

Has Mr. Stein added nothing to the literal rundown? Yes, he has. As he brings a trembling Ed Begley down to the footlights to explain the play's title ("To strike a shadow of my enemy I must strike a man!") it becomes clear that the author means to humanize some figures who may have seemed little more than worried faces in the press. These were shaken people, he suggests; it wasn't easy for either of them, certainly not for Chambers.

Once more, he has set about his purpose in curious fashion. He has turned his hero and his villain, in their most private moments, into cold stone statues. Mr. Begley, as every one in his right mind knows, is a superb actor; Mr. Raymond, after all those years in Hollywood, turns out to be a very good one. But apart from the few low-keyed moments in which accuser and defendant are permitted to shift their eyes in quiet alarm or pluck thoughtfully at the crease in a trouser-leg, both men are required to adopt granite postures and roll out rich, repetetive pulpit rhetoric ("Those who did not understand me then do not understand me now," "Who is more lonely than a man who must remain silent in a country deaf and dumb to history?")

The words are never personal, and they are often pompous. Let it be said, however, that they are framed in a Donald Oenslager setting—a vast double disc out of which an entire courtroom can be lowered into view—that is stunningly impressive.

Daily Mirror

December 12, 1957

ROBERT COLEMAN'S THEATRE

'Shadow' All Too Familiar

Nick Mayo brought an absorbing, documentary, called "A Shadow of My Enemy," to the ANTA Theatre Wednesday evening. In penning it, Sol Stein has told a continuously interesting story without wasted wordage and with highly dramatic effect. It is a parallel to a saga that made headlines a while back.

A magazine writer, Augustus Randall, accuses Horace Smith, a friend high in government circles, of treason to the U. S. as a members of the Communist Party. Smith, of course, denies the charge under oath before an investigating committee, thereby laying himself open to indictment and trial for perjury.

Eventually, he is convicted and sentenced to prison. There is the bare outline. Between the sequences, "a man," a representative of a curious public, seeks to get at Randall's motives for leaving the party, implicating Smith and others, and bringing endless torture to himself and family.

RANDALL, IT SEEMS, after the Soviet-Nazi pact, couldn't stomach communism anymore. He came to a realization that it was a brutal system out to rule the world with a clenched fist; that it was without morals. He thought it his duty to protect the democratic way of life, no matter what the consequences to all involved, by revealing the truth to the nation.

As for Smith, he had such a fanatical belief in the inevitable triumph of communism that he was willing to lie for it, and transmit to Moscow documents which lead to the breaking of our all-important codes. Smith saw Russia as an idealistic ally, while Randall came to know it as a foe for all opposed to ruthless totalitarianism.

Donald Oenslager has designed a stark, utilitarian production in somber browns, with a few props, which enables Daniel Petrie to stage the clash of ideas with drive and pace.

Ed Begley, who shared kudos with Paul Muni in "Inherit the Wind," gives an immensely moving performance of a man torn between friendship and duty. Gene Raymond, too long absent from Broadway, is excellent as the lawyer-statesman who, confronted by damning testimony meets the challenge with arrogance and evasion.

WILLIAM HARRIGAN, one of the theatre's top character actors, stands out as usual as the chairman of the investigating committee, prejudiced in favor of Smith at the beginning but gradually convinced of his guilt. Leon Janney is a compelling inquisitor into the motivations of the adversaries.

John McGovern, who can lend distinction to any part, does just that with a psychologist who gets tangled in his own web. Salutes also should go to Mason Adams, Howard Wierum, William Zuckert, Anne Hegira, Alma Hubbard, Ulla Kazanova and Tom Gorman.

"A Shadow of My Enemy" accomplishes what it sets out to do. It is a probing study of how people become involved with dubious causes and vicious ideologies, continue to believe in them or become disillusioned. It is a trenchant dissection of what makes men and women sell out their country, of what makes traitors of those who have had the best of everything America has to offer.

A box-office success? We're afraid not. For it paraphrases and comments on events that have been fully covered in the press and in numerous books. Tense drama, yes, about matters all too familiar to the public. But perhaps we need a reminder, and this one is first rate.

Journal American

December 12, 1957

Hiss Case Recalled And It's 'Nonsense'

By JOHN McCLAIN

IN THE FINAL MOMENTS of "A Shadow of My Enemy," a man who might be Alger Hiss is pronounced guilty of conspiracy against his country, and at this point a man who might be Whittaker Chambers, his accuser, steps into a hot spotlight and says, "No, no, he is not guilty!" A few seconds later I was fleeing the premises of the ANTA Theatre, and I was sick, sick, sick.

This very obvious paraphrase of the Hiss-Chambers case, having followed the dramatic incidents leading to its conclusion, had been presented with ingenuity—and had then given ground to an assumption that the Hisses of this world are not to be condemned. What's happening is bigger than all of us; he only chose the minority medium.

This is nonsense!

The author, Sol Stein, aided by an enormously imaginative set which lowers and lifts an entire courtroom into stage center, tells the incredible tale of a respected State Department official accused by a senior editor of a national magazine of being part of the same Communist apparatus in which he, the editor, had functioned before his regeneration.

He Was Guilty

There is pathos and excitement in the plight of the informer; there is tragedy in his dedication to what he feels compelled to do; there is even fleeting sympathy for the accused who, remaining staunch in his belief that no lie, no manner of deceit or subterfuge is beyond the demands of the Party, faces boldly into the deluge of evidence against him.

All this was implicit in the records of the legal battle which shook the Union, the echoes of which have extended to the campus at Princeton and brought a blush to many a dowager's cheek. But the fact seems to remain that the personable young State Department gentleman was guilty as hell. So I am not exactly leading the cheer when his adversary cries, "Mercy!"

As sheer theatre "A Shadow of My Enemy" is only pretty good. The trick of Donald Oenslager's set is arresting, and the lighting is expert. Ed Begley, playing the role of the editor who had recanted and pointed the finger at his old friend, is always compelling and thoroughly professional, but he never has a chance to get his teeth well into the scenery. He should have been more violent; he had every reason to be.

As the accused, Gene Raymond is a persuasive and polished Government career man. Bill Harrigan, as the chairman of a Congressional investigating committee is eminently fair and informal, and Leon Janney aptly performs the role of "A Man" who constantly comes out of the shadows to ask embarrassing questions.

But the play lost me. It lost me when the protagonists looked across the shadows of the proscenium, each lit by his personal spotlight, and agreed that the other, in his orbit, was right.

I repeat: Nuts!

New York Post
December 12, 1957

TWO on the AISLE

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

Drama on the Hiss-Chambers Case

There is no doubt in the mind of Sol Stein that Alger Hiss was guilty as charged. In "A Shadow of My Enemy," which opened last night at the ANTA Theater, he has written virtually a documentary report of the Hiss-Chamber case, with only the two chief names changed, but he has also set down his own strong views on the subject, including a vigorous indictment of what he sees as loose, foolish and dangerous liberal sentimentality. It is a play, if you can call it that, which must stand or fall on the essential fascination of a celebrated episode.

In the main, the author has stuck with literal fidelity to the record of the Congressional investigation and the first trial and conviction of Hiss, whom he calls Horace Smith. This means that the play consists almost entirely of courtroom interrogations and answers, and, while such scenes rarely fail completely, they can likewise grow fairly monotonous. Both the interest and the monotony are present in Mr. Stein's dramatization, and I think it requires a strong basic concern with the Hiss-Chambers affair to hold the spectator's steady attention.

The Villain.

The chief creative addition to "A Shadow of My Enemy," outside of calling the defendant Horace Smith and the accuser Augustus Randall, is the introduction of a character described simply as A Man, who seems to represent for Mr. Stein dangerous liberal opinion on the subject. It is he who is the real villain of the piece. According to the author, it isn't that he believes Hiss was innocent. He feels that, even if guilty, the treason belongs to the past and that Chambers performed a dishonorable act in turning informer on a friend.

This strikes me as one of the ways in which the play, for all its documentary fidelity, is a polemic rather than an analysis. It leaves out entirely the attitude of those whose feeling was, not one of exoneration of Hiss, but of still troublesome doubt and uncertainty. Such doubts are not eased by calling them hard names. The other questionable point raised by Mr. Stein is his implication that there was no hysterical atmosphere in the land at the time of the trial and that everyone was automatically on Hiss' side when it began.

What I suppose could be called the big scenes are the confrontations of Hiss and Chambers, and most of them are based on the hearing and trial. But Mr. Stein on various occasions has his stage darkened and brings the antagonists together in spiritual confrontations, in which the man called Smith is guilty, defiant and confident he stands for the wave of the future, while the man called Randall is saddened by his ex-friend's plight and begs him to admit the truth. At the end, it is the blind liberal, not the traitor, who draws his scorn.

The two leading roles are skillfully played, with Ed Begley, always a superb actor, tortured, noble and appealingly sympathetic in the Chambers part, and Gene Raymond, handsome, assured and always suave in the Hiss representation. There are good performances by Leon Janney, as the symbolic liberal, and by William Harrigan, William Zuckert, John McGovern and Howard Wierum as lesser figures. The interest inherent in the historic case is certainly there, but I think it has been too flatly dramatized to make for a play with any creative dramatic distinction.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun
December 12, 1957

Drama Built On Hiss Trial

By FRANK ASTON.

It's different. "A Shadow of My Enemy" at the Anta has the shock value of surprise, for plays like this are not expected every day among the flesh pots of Broadway. This two-acter by Sol Stein hammers emotionally and intellectually at the thought that the free world must be awakened to the peril of communism.

Mr. Stein's chief aim is not superficial entertainment, because there is little in his contribution that one may lightly like. Instead, he is trying to enlist the theater in civilization's struggle against the encroaching Kremlin, and he has had the courage to dramatize a brief series of coalesced incidents which should anger, challenge, stimulate and possibly beguile those willing to give it their attention.

Thin Disguise.

Under thin disguise, the author tells the Hiss-Chambers story of Communist treachery brought to trial. Barely mentioning the pumpkin papers and typewriter, he concentrates on the massive theme of Soviet menace with action which is psychological, conflict which is socially universal and suspense which doesn't really strike home until the final curtain is falling on the ominous line that "the trial has just begun." Mr. Stein doesn't know how to kill communism. But in a theatrical way he is flashing danger signals.

Donald Oenslager has provided extraordinary staging. When he needs a courtroom, he seems to tilt the back wall forward on floor hinges to a horizontal position, with all necessary furniture in place. This contrivance and the use of lights assure novelty and speed and should win the master a fresh diploma in inventiveness.

Acting Skilled.

The acting, unrelentingly stern and frequently harrowing, is done with high skill under Daniel Petrie's direction. Ed Begley, as the renegade Commie hoping to make amends, again proves himself to be one of our topmost craftsman. Gene Raymond returns to the local boards in considerable triumph as the unprincipled party member. Something like a dozen other roles, all difficult, are played extremely well. Offstage choral music heightens the mood.

Don't go to this one for jollification. But go if you want to experience the tug of bitter, understated drama involving your existence; for Mr. Stein, from that point of view, has written a gripping and important play.

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

December 12, 1957

'Shadow of My Enemy' Adroit Documentary

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Sol Stein's drama, "A Shadow of My Enemy," which was presented at the ANTA Theatre last evening, is an ingenious Q-and-A distillation of the Alger Hiss case—an affair which revealed to a surprised nation the cunning and depth of Communist penetration into our government.

It is, in essence, a documentary of a series of hearings and a trial which jolted us—but which, perhaps, did not awaken us. The author's point in "A Shadow of My Enemy," spoken in the last moments of the drama, is that treachery has not been abolished just because one traitor has been convicted. In these last moments the traitor taunts the man who has exposed him, saying that he and his purpose will endure even though he must go to prison, whereas his exposer has by now destroyed himself.

Well Staged

This drama is clear-cut, well-staged and in most cases well-acted. But it is so clear-cut, so carefully organized, that it is dispassionate. In their judgments all men should be dispassionate, but the theatre is not life. In the theatre some kind of passion must rule. It can be sex or murder or opinion; it can be mystery or romance—but the theatre must, by its very nature, arouse excitement in us.

The excitement I found in "A Shadow of My Enemy" last evening came not from the play itself, which concerned the moral conflict between a dedicated Communist and a man who had renounced Communism, but from the manner in which the play was done. The doing was admirable and I relished its technique—but the telling seldom managed to stir my pulse.

An Adroit Job

Although he uses fictitious names, Stein is writing about Hiss, the State Department employe, and Whittaker Chambers, the Time magazine man who exposed Hiss and himself, too. Stein has been most adroit in compressing the essentials of a fantastic investigation and trial.

The author has been greatly aided by the scene designer, Donald Oenslager, who seems to have come up with a new twist in stage carpentry. Oenslager has mounted the drama on what I'd call a waffle-iron stage—a circular affair which does not turn but moves up and down like the top of a waffle cooker. It is ingenious, it is admirably simple and it is highly effective theatrically.

Ed Begley plays the accuser, supposedly Chambers, with fine sincerity. Gene Raymond, purportedly Hiss, plays almost too coldly to get the dramatic effect he needs. There are good performances by William Harrigan as an investigating Congressman, Howard Wierum as a defense lawyer, William Zuckert as a prosecutor and Anne Hegira as Begley's wife.

"The Genius and the Goddess"

Daily Mirror

December 11, 1957

ROBERT COLEMAN'S THEATRE

'Genius' Misses the Mark

"The Genius and the Goddess" is a sex story told in terms of physics and philosophy. We suspect that Aldous Huxley supplied the philosophy, while either Beth Wendel or Alec Coppel tossed in the sex. As a long-time admirer of Huxley, we can only say that he is far superior as novelist and short-story writer than as dramatist.

The genius of the title is a physicist of the calibre of Milliken or Fermi who, back in 1921, had fun making the atom do tricks. The goddess is his good-looking wife, mother of their two children, and quite a bit younger than he. The prof not only is a whiz in the laboratory, but also a sometimes collector of erotica, which he keeps in a locked box along with his learned manuscripts, insurance policies, etc.

ABSENT-MINDEDLY, he forgets to tell his wife that he has invited a young assistant to live at their house. But it works out all right, for the graduate researcher is a nice, strait-laced, idealistic fellow who helps with the family chores. Then tragedy strikes. The wife's mother dies, and the professor almost expires with pneumonia.

With the genius unconscious upstairs, the goddess finds surcease from her troubles in an affair with the boarder. A miracle happens, and the husband recovers. The tyro Michelson has a bout with his conscience and, over the protests of his hosts, accepts a position at another university.

The goddess justifies her brief fling by observing that members of her exalted ilk never come to conclusions, as if the spurned Pallas Athena, according to Homer, didn't conclude that Troy should be destroyed. Only fiction is true, she says. Reality is a series of paradoxes and nonsequiturs. In other words, what's wrong with obeying a natural impulse?

Maybe you can buy that line of reasoning. We cannot. Particularly when none of the angles of the triangle has been portrayed as susceptible to such sudden passions. It all seemed unbelievable to us. At least, O'Neill in "Moon for the Misbegotten" and Anderson in "Tea and Sympathy" prepared us for such sexy didoes in time of crisis.

The versatile Richard Whorf has not only directed the new tenant of Henry Miller's Theatre for all it's worth, but designed an accurate setting for it as well. Here's a lad who can act with the best, stage a script with skill, dash off decor and even paint canvases that are bought by connoisseurs.

NANCY KELLY, who looks the part, makes the goddess more convincing than the authors. Alan Webb, an admirable actor, is excellent as the scientist who can be erudite and as fractious as his offspring. And there are helpful contributions by Michael Tolan, Olga Fabian, Nina Reader and Billy Quinn.

Courtney Burr produced "The Genius and the Goddess" in association with Liska March. It is easy to understand why they went for it, for it has intelligent humor, provocative ideas and essentially appealing characters. Yet, paradoxically, the latter lack that humanity which spells credibility—even in terms of theatre. In sum, this dramatic arrow's aim is purposeful, but its flight erratic.

"THE GENIUS AND THE GODDESS"

Play in three acts and seven scenes by Aldous Huxley and Beth Wendel in collaboration with Alec Coppel, based on Mr. Huxley's novel; staged and designed by Richard Whorf; costumes by Virginia Volland; presented by Courtney Burr in association with Liska March at Henry Miller's Theatre, December 10, 1957. The cast:

Timmy Maartens... Billy Quinn
Ruth Maartens.... Nina Reader
Dr. Henry Maartens.. Alan Webb
Katy Maartens..... Nancy Kelly
Bertha..... Olga Fabian
John Rivers..... Michael Tolan

New York World-Telegram and The [illegible] Sun

December 11, 1957

Huxley Novel In Adaptation

By FRANK ASTON.

Through the first and well into the second act at the Henry Miller last evening many of us were chortling aloud. It seemed something dramatic might come out of "The Genius and the Goddess," based on an Aldous Huxley novel.

In the early passages the authors (three are credited) make quips about the eccentric, appealing personality of an atom chasing scientist and his erratic family life. He helps his small son work a problem by covering a blackboard with weird equations while his wife works it in her head. When he's crossed, he imagines he's coming down with a bad cough, and his wife cures it by letting him have his way. The lines are often comical and the playing is a joy.

Suddenly the laughs stop when the wife's mother dies, the husband lies near death and the lady blithely sins with a young scientist whom the elder man has welcomed into the household. Next morning the youth begs her to fly with him, but she'll have none of that, insisting she can stay put and distribute her affections equitably among him, her husband, her two children and the memory of her mother. If the lad insists she's a goddess, says she evenly, he must pause to consider that for a goddess there can never be a conclusion, only constant beginnings.

When the convalescent genius rejoins the amorous pair, talk brightens again, as the writers manage to treat adultery with a humorous detatchment. The period of all this is 1920-21, and at that time public flippancy toward infidelity would have been deemed extremely advanced. Last night it was accepted as a spoof.

This onlooker recommends the show as adult and intelligent entertainment. He is not cheering himself hoarse over it as a drama. In that sense it is pretty bad.

At the same time, your messenger is hollering in admiration for Nancy Kelly, as the understanding wife. Few actresses can stand up straight, face an audience and look mobile. She can. Your messenger cannot find it in his purity of heart to blame her roomer one bit, Alan Webb is delightfully droll as the little atom chaser and Michael Tolan is properly tortured by illicit love. Two children, Nina Reader and Billy Quinn, are marvels, like all stage kids these days. Olga Fabian rounds out the cast which has been drilled by Richard Whorf. The Volland costumes are lovely, but then what wouldn't be on that Kelly woman?

The New York Times

December 11, 1957

Theatre: Huxley by Three

'The Genius and the Goddess' Opens

By BROOKS ATKINSON

TOO many authors have spoiled "The Genius and the Goddess," which opened at Henry Miller's last evening.

This is a bold statement from one who has not read Aldous Huxley's first draft or the novel from which it was derived. But the statement is based on the evidence: (1) that Mr. Huxley is not himself a pointless writer; and (2) that three people are credited with the authorship—Mr. Huxley, Beth Wendel and Alec Coppel.

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By putting their heads and pens together, they have produced a maundering, trivial tale about an absent-minded professor whose assistant has at least one passionate encounter with the professor's wife—very much to her satisfaction, though the assistant does have a few moral scruples the next day. Being a gentleman of the old school, the assistant takes off for Pasadena obediently, presumably to make a fresh start toward virtue. The professor and his wife settle down happily to their familiar domestic life.

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But this sort of commonplace anecdote does not sound much like Mr. Huxley. He is not only immensely erudite, but he is a thinker who looks for meanings. It is obvious that his genius—the professor—is a weakling who drains strength from his goddess—the wife. Very illuminating, and a very good idea, too. Let's have more of this sort of thing.

But the goddess also finds the professor's assistant a source of strength at a time when she feels depleted. And the strength she drains from him not only restores her but also seems to be the force that restores the professor to health after a bout with pneumonia. Where does this leave the professor's assistant? He can't go on like this indefinitely.

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If "The Genius and the Goddess" really expressed what Mr. Huxley has in mind, the question would not be asked, at least not so frivolously. But what we see on the stage is a dreary story about a professor's home life, two-thirds of which is exposition decorated with pedantic jokes and learned references. From all this fiddle-faddle, the genius of the title emerges as a kind of lackluster Mr. Chips who is mean, selfish, obtuse and boring.

Nothing on the stage dispels this impression. Doubling as scene designer and director of the performance, Richard Whorf has provided a suitable setting, representing a living room that is both refined and dingy. But the performance is as much at loose ends as the script. Acting the professor, Alan Webb succeeds in expressing the helplessness of the character, but none of the genius.

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Nancy Kelly plays the part of the wife with her usual good health and directness. As the assistant, Michael Tolman is uniformly earnest. Fortunately he does not seem to be embarrassed by the wife's very specific inquiry into the character of his sex life before he has had time to unpack his traveling bag. He gives an accounting as readily as if he were itemizing his supply of socks and shirts.

One of the several authors of "The Genius and the Goddess" might have managed this episode less clumsily. Like a lot of other things in the play, it has got out of hand.

New York Post

December 11, 1957

TWO on the AISLE

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

The Stage Rebuffs Aldous Huxley

The drama and Aldous Huxley met in a mutually disastrous scuffle at Henry Miller's Theater last night. The occasion was "The Genius and the Goddess," which Mr. Huxley, abetted by Beth Wendel and Alec Coppel, adapted for the stage from his novel of the same name, and the result, I am sorry to say, was neither a good play nor good Huxley. Among other weaknesses, the dramatization, despite several skilled performances, proved to be almost steadily and continuously lifeless.

Only in the third act did the proceedings rise from the doldrums long enough to capture any suggestion of the quality of intelligence and provocative insight that has made Mr. Huxley so interesting a figure in contemporary letters, and even here the sudden improvement was too little and too late. The impression was that the brief touch of the author's characteristic approach had been superimposed on an otherwise remarkably commonplace narrative.

Married Life

Up to that point, "The Genius and the Goddess" was a laborious contemplation of the tedious married life of a dull, pedantic, selfish and generally insufferable middle-aged scientist and his infinitely long-suffering and understanding young wife. When a youthful disciple of the great man arrives to take up his post as resident assistant and shows signs of appreciating the tolerant lady, you know that his appreciation will eventually have a sound physical basis.

It is one of the intentions of the play to show the contrast between the genius of the great scientist—the period is 1921 and he has recently won the Nobel prize for his experiments with the atom—and his childish pettiness as a man, but the emphasis on his whining boorishness is carried to extremes. In fact, he is so disagreeable that, when he is reported seriously ill and the family maid is shown transported by happiness, I thought for a moment that she had heard of his death.

Feminine Wisdom

After the belated affair between the assistant and the young wife, the youth takes the matter with intense seriousness, and the efforts of the Candida-like lady to let him know that nothing tragic has happened give Mr. Huxley an opportunity to present some of his thoughtful observations on life and sex. But, while they give a momentary lift to the play, they are all too brief and show the difficulty he has in presenting his thought in successful dramatic terms.

Alan Webb, as the first half of the title role, achieves the remarkable feat of giving a certain amount of humor to the unbearable fellow, and Nancy Kelly, as the second half, plays with charm, simplicity and feeling, while Michael Tolan is believable as the naive and serious younger man. And the two children of the family are sensibly played by Nina Reader and Billy Quinn. But "The Genius and the Goddess" represents a far from happy union between the stage and Mr. Huxley.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 11, 1957

FIRST NIGHT REPORT

WALTER KERR'S REVIEW

'The Genius and the Goddess'

SOME people went back into the Henry Miller for the third act Tuesday evening because they wanted to see how the play came out. I went back in because I wanted to see how it started.

To tell the strict truth, "The Genius and the Goddess" had swung into action a few minutes before that, precisely with the descent of the second-act curtain, when a young assistant scientist put his strong, compassionate arms around the wife of his superior, gave the lady a good hug, and noticed that the lady was hugging back.

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Until that time nobody in St. Louis (1921-'22) seemed to be doing anything, or at least not anything they shouldn't have been doing. The children of theoretorical physicist Henry Maartens bounced brightly home from school to tell gruesome tales about the Fall of the House of Usher, to play with their railroad trains all over the living-room floor, and to present daddy with their arithmetic problems.

Let it be said, in passing, that the arithmetic problems are charmingly managed. Daddy, great brain that he is, strides to his blackboard and covers it with long, sprawling equations, while mommy—biting her lip a bit and carrying everything in her head—solves it in half the time. As Alan Webb and Nancy Kelly play out the scene, it is delightful.

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The young research scientist arrives, to stay for two and one-half acts. Mother leaves for Chicago, where her mother is dying, to stay for approximately an act. The children are packed off to neighbors. This leaves daddy and his right-hand man alone together, and daddy is miserable.

Once more in passing, Alan Webb's misery is magnificent. Developing an ever more alarming bronchial condition in the hope that his wife will come running back to him, encouraging his rather hidebound colleague to take an interest in sex ("It's popular, you know"), and tossing aside the Nobel Prize with a casual "Oh, that Swedish medal!", Mr. Webb puts his rabbity mustache, his airily twitching nose, and his restless inner-spring heels to work with splendidly funny results.

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Then, with the rise and fall of a mid-act curtain, we are suddenly dropped into another play. The bronchial condition has become real and threatening, the wife's mother is dead, the wife herself is distraught, exhausted, and "drained of virtue," and the interloper is simply standing by for that sympathetic clinch. What has seemed a light and random domestic comedy has turned into a morose, mildly passionate, study of exhaustion and late-night opportunity.

The third act is consumed with a great deal of understanding between the unexpectedly betrayed parties, several handsome speeches handsomely delivered by Miss Kelly, and no particular resolution to the problem that is at long last posed.

Perhaps the clue to what authors Aldous Huxley, Beth Wendel, and Alec Coppel are after in this odd and erratic journey through a variety of emotional tones is hidden in one of Miss Kelly's gentle, but firm, lectures. "This is reality, not fiction!" she exclaims. Remarking that fiction is tidy and consistent and comes to a point, she goes on to say that "reality is just a series of paradoxes and non-sequiturs." The notion may have some truth in it, but isn't the theater entitled to just a little bit of fiction in order to keep its head clear and its sense of direction intact?

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A last word, still in passing. Michael Tolan's repressed young house-guest is pleasantly, modestly done, and red-headed Nina Reader is delectable as she reads—proudly, but sensibly and musically — one of the poems she has written while the family was paying no attention.